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# Economic and Social Council

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**Committee for Programme and Coordination**
**Forty-first session**
11 June to 6 July 2001
Agenda item 9
**Adoption of the report of the Committee on the work of its forty-first session**

## Draft report

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**Addendum**

## Programme questions: evaluation

*(item 4 (b))*

### Evaluation of sustainable development

1. At its second and fourth meetings, on 11 and 12 June 2001, the Committee considered the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development (E/AC.51/2001/2).

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services introduced the report. Representatives of the Secretary-General responded to the questions raised during the Committee's consideration of the report.

**Discussion**

3. The Committee considered that the evaluation report provides an understanding of the achievements as well as the difficulties met in carrying out the United Nations sustainable development agenda.

4. The view was expressed that, since 1992, when Agenda 21 was adopted, the United Nations has taken important steps to ensure an effective follow-up. However, it was stated that the lack of common understanding of the concept of sustainable development is a matter that requires inter-agency attention, as recommended in the evaluation report's recommendations 2.a and 2.b. Regarding recommendation 2.a

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and the recommended summaries of main policy aspects of priority issues, the view was expressed that poverty and consumption and production patterns should be among the major issues for discussion rather than the sole basis for discussion, and that the summaries should serve as a starting point for discussions.

5. It was stressed that the preparation of national reports is a burden for less developed countries. The question was raised of what benefits are derived from the preparation of these reports and what follow-up is carried out. Strong support was expressed for the proposals to bring forth key information in time for due consideration by intergovernmental bodies, while reducing their reporting burdens, as presented in recommendation three.

6. The Committee stressed the need to ensure that regional, subregional and national perspectives are taken into account since each region has its own characteristics. It was stated that sustainable efforts in each region will reinforce achievements at the global level. It was considered that the role of the regional commissions needs to be expanded. The view was expressed that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs needs to consult more widely with all relevant actors and build on existing guidance in taking forward national strategies. It was recommended that national monitoring of nationally owned strategies be encouraged.

7. In respect of the inter-agency Task Force on Sustainable Development Strategies, coordinated by UNDP, a question was raised on the progress of the work of the Task Force. The view was expressed that the Commission on Sustainable Development indicators should be used as a tool by national Governments to assess their own progress on sustainable development, rather than as a cross-cutting international effort to compare one country to another.

8. The view was expressed that it is essential to ensure a convergence between different country-level frameworks, especially in trying to ensure that poverty reduction strategies become genuinely sustainable strategies. In particular, it was considered that the recently agreed OECD Development Assistance Committee guidance entitled "Strategies for sustainable development: practical guidance for development cooperation" provides a good basis for work.

9. Concerns were expressed about the difficulty of funding technical assistance implemented by the Division for Sustainable Development. Regarding the serious issue of water resources, a question was raised on the funding available for comprehensive assessments on which strategic water management plans can be based. It was suggested that the Division for Sustainable Development conduct a strategic review of its technical assistance activities so as to focus on areas of particular need and on where assistance can make a unique contribution.

10. The view was expressed that the evaluation focused too narrowly on the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in particular that it would have been useful to assess the influence of coordination by the Division on the implementation of United Nations programmes. A number of thematic aspects could have been developed, such as poverty alleviation or progress made under the different conventions related to sustainable development.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

**11. The Committee recommended approval of the recommendations of the in-depth evaluation.**

**12. The Committee recommended that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs consult more widely with all relevant organs and build on existing guidance in taking forward national strategies.**

**13. The Committee emphasized that national monitoring of nationally owned strategies should be encouraged.**